

Thinking About Critical Thinking

Abstract

This interactive session will involve participants in the important (and often ignored) goal of defining critical thinking as a basis for teaching critical thinking. We'll provide examples and ask participants to formulate their own. With this foundation we (session facilitators and participants) will generate methods of teaching and assessing this important topic.

Keywords: Critical thinking

Introduction

Critical thinking sure sounds good, doesn't it?! Sure, we should teach it! However, stakeholders who call for us to teach critical thinking rarely tell us what they mean by that term, leaving many of us unsure as to how to teach and assess it. The purpose of this session is to get participants thinking about critical thinking. We will interactively produce different perspectives or definitions of critical thinking and then, similarly interactively, learn of ways to teach and assess it. While we will not prescribe a definition or solutions, we believe this concept is too important to escape examination.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

Stakeholders, including the AACSB and other accrediting bodies, call for training our students in critical thinking. These calls have grown since Arum & Roska's (2011) publication of "Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College campuses" showing that students generally do not improve in this skill during their college years. However, researchers (cf., Grauerholz & Bouma-Holtrop, 2003; Rickles, Schbeider, Slusser, Willimas, & Zipp, 2013) have noted the difficulty in defining critical thinking. For example, some authors (e.g., Willingham, 2008) insist critical thinking is vitally bound to specific academic content while others (e.g., Massengill, 2011) believe that critical thinking is a set of skills that transcends academic disciplines. Naturally, until we can decide what, exactly, critical thinking is, it is difficult to teach it. Our session will contribute to effective teaching and learning by helping session participants formulate their definitions of and/or approaches to critical thinking. We'll make efforts to find common elements of these definitions but we recognize that ultimately teach best following their own definitions.

To emphasize the importance of critical thinking (cf. Facione 2011) we'll ask session participants to extend their definitions of critical thinking to think about applications that emphasize the importance of critical thinking. We'll do this in a way that models the actual teaching of critical thinking. Students (and session participants) should become more motivated to teach or learn critical thinking upon recognizing its applications and importance.

Once session participants have formulated definitions of critical thinking and talking points for its importance, we'll examine methods of teaching it. We'll offer one brief case to ground the discussion and ask participants how the particulars of the case fit with their thinking about critical thinking. We'll then ask them to sketch out ideas for this own teaching based on their definitions of critical thinking.

Finally, this session will address how one might assess critical thinking. We'll present a few rubrics based on our own and other popular definitions of critical thinking. We'll likely not have time to have participants develop their own assessments/rubrics in-session, but participants will be well-prepared to create these assessments any time after our session.

Session Description/Timeline

Note that all sections of this session noted below will be done interactively

:00-:05	Introduction of facilitators Address impetus for this session
:05-:20	Definitions/examples of critical thinking Synthesis of definitions
:20-:25	Why is critical thinking important?

	What is our role in teaching critical thinking?
:25-:45	Methods for teaching critical thinking (Possibly present one critical thinking exercise to help ground the discussion)
:45-:55	Assessing critical thinking
:55-:60	Wrap-up; Slack time

References

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